

Testimony in Support of Preserving the Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund for Future Generations of Connecticut Veterans

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Daniel Thurston, Chairman of the Connecticut Veterans and Military Coalition (CVMC) and a Legislative Director for the American Veterans (AmVets) Department of Connecticut.

The CVMC is comprised of Veterans Service Organizations and Military Associations with a common mission to advocate the coalescence of the voices of associations and organizations devoted to improving the well-being and life-style of veterans, military retirees and uniformed service members.

I am here today to speak in favor of proposals to insure that The Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund continues to provide veterans and their families with temporary assistance in times of financial hardship.

In 1919 the State of Connecticut established The Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund (SSMF) to provide veterans and their families with temporary assistance in times of financial hardship. In December 1919 The American Legion accepted the responsibility for the administration of the fund and has executed that sacred responsibility for nearly 95 years. The fiduciary responsibility has been with the State Treasurer and the interest from the trust fund has been used to provide food, clothing, medical care, and funerals for needy Connecticut veterans and their families since World War I.

In January 2006 the legislature did a comprehensive Legislative Program Review and Investigation on the SSMF and its operation. The review committee, in its report, recommended that Part II of Chapter 506 of the Connecticut General Statutes be amended to transfer the fiduciary responsibility of the Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund from the treasurer of the State of Connecticut to the American Legion (Department of Connecticut). Governor Malloy in his 2013 Budget proposal reaffirmed the recommendation of the review committee.

The 2013 Governor's Budget Proposal included provisions to transfer to the American Legion both administrative AND fiduciary responsibility, allowing the Legion to organize the SSMF as a non-profit 501 c (3). The American Legion voted in executive session to accept that responsibility.

Member organizations of the CVMC, in separate deliberation, have expressed support for the creation of a charitable non-profit 501 c (3) to carry on with the mission of the Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund.

However, in legislation enacted in the 2013 legislative session, the corpus remains in the custody of the Treasurer as trustee of the fund and the administration would be transferred to the American Legion. The legislation also imposed budget restriction that would, in our opinion, severely restrict services to needy veterans and their families.

The goal of the CVMC is (1) to insure that either sufficient budgetary funding is available to allow the American Legion to efficiently and effectively operate the Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Fund, OR (2) to rescind HB-6706 PA 13-247 Section 121 and Section 122 restoring the operation of the Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Fund to its January 1, 2013 statutory requirements.

The CVMC believes Governor Malloy's 2014 recommendation as submitted in the Governor's Bill No. 21, Sec. 15 through Sec. 23 provides a foundation for a workable solution.

The overwhelming concern in regard to this solution is Connecticut General Statutes, PART II of Chapter 506, Sec. 27-128 which gives the authority to transfer moneys to and from the fund. The CVMC strongly recommends that Sec. 27-128 be repealed if the provisions in SB-21 are implemented. This would help to insure that the Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund continues to provide assistance to needy veterans and their families.

In summary, the need for assistance by the estimated 3-6 thousand men and women returning to Connecticut as well as those that currently serve in the National Guard and Reserve will in the next few years place a significant demand on all services provided by the State and the Veterans Service Organizations.

There will be a continuing need for temporary assistance for the men and women that have sacrificed in the service of our nation. Citizens of Connecticut that have served, as well as their families, have earned through their devotion to our state and nation, our full support.

The Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund has served generation of veterans in need for nearly a century. I urge this Legislature with the support of the Governor to prepare to meet the need of this generation of veterans and act with thoughtful deliberation to insure the future of the Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund.

On behalf of the Connecticut Veterans and Military Coalition member organizations, I thank you for your time to allow us to express our support of the Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund and for your commitment to the Veterans and Citizens of Connecticut. This concludes my testimony and I am available for any questions you may have.

Respectful Submitted,



Daniel C. Thurston

Chairman Connecticut Veterans and Military Coalition
State Vice-Commander, American Veterans (AmVets), Connecticut
Vietnam Veteran, USAF
860-485-2676
VetsTalk@snet.net